

Navy RAGBRAI 2013

by CDR Rod Turbak

Team Navy was represented well at the 41st running of the Register's Annual Great Bike Ride Across Iowa, better known as RAGBRAI. CDR Rod Turbak and LCDR Steve Wessner from Fleet Logistics Support Wing and CDR Mike Mrachek from Air Logistics Training Center here on JRB Ft Worth rode nearly 450 miles across Iowa from July 21-27, while camping in between segments.

The annual ride started in 1973, created by two columnists who invited a few friends along for the trek. RAGBRAI is the oldest, largest and longest bicycle touring event in the world which attracts participants from all 50 states and many foreign countries. An average of 8,500-10,000 cyclists complete the entire route with as many as 15,000-20,000 riders participating each day. While daily mileage counts vary from a low of 50 miles to a high of 108 miles, this year was one of the shortest overall routes in history at 406.6 miles.

Throughout the week, Team Navy stopped along the way promoting good will and sharing positive enforcement of Service to our Country. This year's team was comprised of 48 members including Active, Reserve, Retired, Officer and Enlisted. Former Chief of Navy Reserve Vice Admiral Debbink and former Commander Navy Reserve Forces Command Rear Admiral McDonald were but a few of the individuals representing Team Navy this year. Two Marines represented the Corps on this year's team as well.

Unfortunately, two weeks prior to the ride, retired Colonel Paul Ladd, a 28 year USMC veteran and Team Navy member, was killed riding his bike while training on an Iowa roadway. Team Navy and the town of Knoxville, IA participated in a Mayor's proclamation and street naming dedication in his honor. Additionally, throughout the week members of Team Navy took turns wearing Colonel Ladd's Marine Corps cycling jersey bearing his name tag, symbolizing one last ride for him across Iowa. For the team, day two of RAGBRAI was specifically dedicated in his honor with the intent of bringing attention to the need for a "3-foot" passing law in many of the remaining States.

The people of Iowa couldn't have been more welcoming and LCDR Wessner specifically commented that "they were some of the most down to earth individuals I have met in my travels." From fresh homemade rhubarb pie to local dance team competitions, the people of each town along the route provided a wide variety of Iowan hospitality. A Midwest native of South Dakota, CDR Turbak enjoyed riding his bike around the half mile dirt racetrack that serves as the home of the Sprint Car Knoxville Nationals each year. CDR Mrachek was personally impressed by the sheer number of people that traveled from all points around the globe and how easily everybody got along.

Although it should be apparent that it is the journey that matters in this week-long event, it is also hard not to comment on the finish which ended in Ft Madison, IA on the banks of the Mississippi River. As Team Navy rode the streets two abreast for the last half mile, on-lookers and supporters lined the streets clapping and yelling their support. The Team continued in formation while riding to Anchors Aweigh and the Marine Corps Hymn ending at the tire dipping ceremony which marks the end of the journey for another year. If you haven't heard of this event previously, you must look into it and think of adding it to your bucket list as there is little that can compare to the sense of accomplishment and pride of completing this trek across not-so-flat Iowa. Who would have thought.....



Team Navy!



Left to right; CDR Mike Mrachek, LCDR Steve Wessner, CDR Rod Turbak